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ABSTRACT

This book reports on the Illinois Valedictorian Project, an ongoing longitudinal study of the life paths of 81 high school valedictorians. Chapter 1 describes the 1981 high school graduation of the valedictorians and traces the diverging life paths of two top working-class students. Chapter 2 plots the road to the top of the high school class. Chapter 3 explores the meaning of success by investigating adult outcomes for valedictorians in light of their education, careers, life satisfaction, and personally held goals. Chapter 4 describes the college years using a typology in which student backgrounds and academic orientations interact with college experiences to determine career aspirations and outcomes. Chapter 5 focuses on the female valedictorians. Chapter 6 considers the college and career paths of minority valedictorians. Chapter 7 evaluates the effects of various trajectories of career choice and professional socialization on satisfaction and adult attainment. Chapter 8 deals with personal and intimate relationships and their career effects. Chapter 9 describes the joys and sorrows of the valedictorians over time, focusing on the sources of their deepest delights and the ways they cope with routine and serious setbacks. Chapter 10 considers potentially eminent valedictorians. Chapter 11 reviews project findings and synthesizes themes. (Contains 87 references and 7 tables.) (JB)

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